WHIRRAKEE

July 2003 Vol. 24 No. 6

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MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $34; Family $40; Concession: Single $28.50; Family $34. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $34. These rates include GST.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The invited speaker at general meetings starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper.
If a workshop is held prior to the meeting, it will be advertised and it usually starts at 7.00pm.
The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearers listed above, together with the following members: Barbara Pelczynska, Bob Ruddick, Maurie Stone, Stuart Fraser.

Excursions Excursions are conducted irregularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. In addition to local excursions, campouts are held several times each year, usually coinciding with long weekends or holiday periods.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club has two active sub-groups:

Fauna Study Group: meets on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building.

Chairman: John Burtonclay, Fadersons Lane, Mandurang (5439 5710)
Secretary: Bill Holsworth, 13 Nabilla Crs., Bendigo (5443 4063)
Equipment Officer: Maurie Lewis (0407 427179)

Bird Observers Group: meets on the first Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm in the Golden Square Senior Citizen Building.

Front Cover: Photographer: Darren Green

Miles Geldard, a student of Nature Tourism at La Trobe University held a very successful workshop for those interested in nature drawings. He brought with him many examples of various styles of sketching and drawing, like this one of a cicada shell. A few more photos can be seen on pages 7 to 9 of this issue.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club

Vol. 24, No. 6, July 2003

Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*) which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles.
Contributions will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although articles received more than one week after the monthly General Meeting will probably be too late for inclusion in the next issue of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's note
This is a very slim edition. The reason it contains many photos of Darren Green is because they turned out well, and, of course, that there was a distinct lack of written material to fill the space. Photos are always welcome. As more of you people acquire digital cameras, why not try and send some photos via e-mail? A very convenient and very inexpensive way to put a picture in the Whirrakee.

Recent Bird Observations

Author; Bird Observers Group

Yellow Robin (2 males, 1 female), Sedgwick, 4/6/03
Scarlet Honeyeater (1), Sedgwick, 28/5/03
Crescent Honeyeater (1), Sedgwick, 29/5/03 and (1), Mandurang, Tannery Lane, May 03
Musk Duck (1 female), Kennington Reservoir, 18/5/03
Yellow tufted Honeyeater (several), Diamond Hill area, 29/5/03
Yellow faced Honeyeater (several), Diamond Hill area, 29/5/03
Noisy Friarbird (several), Diamond Hill area, 29/5/03
Scarlet Robin (1), near Sandhurst Reservoir, 29/5/03
Little Wattlebird (2), Hattam Street, Golden Square 6/6/03 and Vain Street, Golden Square, 7/6/03
Diamond Firetail (1), Goornong, 4/6/03

Notes:
Unusual sightings of honeyeaters have continued to prompt lots of discussion and interest. The sighting of a Scarlet Honeyeater was quite notable. The Crescent Honeyeater is also unusual for this region with two sightings. The bird at Mandurang has been in the area for a few weeks and was still present at the time of writing.

Another bird considered unusual for our area is the Little Wattlebird, seen at Golden Square (also see Tom Burton's record in the last *Whirrakee*). The birds at Golden Square were seen in ironbarks at the front of Golden Square Secondary College.
Also note, that Noisy Friarbirds are still present in the district.

A note about the Yellow Robins at Sedgwick. The birds mentioned are usually present in the area and one bird is known to be at least 10 years old.

Erratum for June *Whirrakee* (page 5) article by Mark Bellette, 'A new species of grass tree':

There has been a mistake in the name of the grass tree *Xanthorrhoea glauca* subsp *angustifolium*. The subspecies' name is *angustifolia* not *-folium* as I wrote. The confusion lay in the fact that *folia* is derived from the Latin *folium* (leaf).

From the Mailbag
Author: Elaine Mathison

Each month the club receives a number of newsletters and magazines: some by subscription and some in exchange for Whirrakee. These are available from the club library.

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THE VICTORIAN NATURALIST(VFNC)
April 2003

"The Use of Artificial Nestboxes by Brush-tailed Phascogales in Rushworth Forest" describes the study of the distribution and abundance of this rare species over the last six years. The process has involved a combination of nestboxes, trapping, observation and spotlighting.

"Behaviour and Ecology of the Bottlenose Dolphin in Port Phillip Bay" reports on the dolphin population in the southern end of the bay. Land based observations were used to document group activities, ie travel, feeding and social behaviours.

"Distribution of Logs in a Dry Sclerophyll Forest, Brisbane Ranges, Victoria" looks at an exploration of the pattern of fallen timber, an important habitat for small vertebrate and invertebrate animals.

"North-West Victorian Range Extension and Unusual Habitat Use of the Powerful Owl" reports an observation on the Wimmera River in the Little Desert National Park of this bird which is normally found in wet forests.

"The Southern Hemisphere Constellations": the boundaries of 88 star constellations were defined in 1930, but they have a history dating from antiquity.

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BIRD OBSERVER(BOCA)
June 2003

- The Birds of Christmas Island: few endemic birds but a great opportunity to see migrating species from the northern hemisphere.
- First Visit to Ned's Corner Station: Sunraysia Bird Observers carry out the first of many surveys planned as the property's rehabilitation begins.
- Last Call to Save the Daintree: beautiful one day; gone the next. Rainforest Rescue is raising funds to buy back privately owned rainforest blocks.

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PARKWATCH(VNPA)
June 2003

"Broken-Boosey State Park": is described as the most unlikely, unusual and unexpected park in our national parks system, and probably the most unknown. It is the public land water frontages and other reserves along Boosey Creek, Broken Creek and Nine Mile Creek between Tungamah and Wunghnu in northern Victoria.

"Grazing gets a blazing" looks at the Bogong High Plains after the recent fire, and notes that grazed areas burned as readily as those ungrazed. Bog areas once protected from cattle grazing by the shrub layer are now accessible to cattle wandering freely where fences have been destroyed.

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Also received recently:

*Castlemaine Naturalist(CFNC) June 2003

*Ballarat Naturalist(BFNC) June 2003

*Geelong Naturalist(GFNC) June 2003

*Sun-Nat(Sunraysia FNC) June-July 2003

*Field Nats News(FNCV) June 2003

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June General Meeting:
First Impressions of the Environment of the Mount Alexander Goldfields
Speaker: Deirdre Slattery

by Sabine Wilkens

Deirdre Slattery, a lecturer at La Trobe University, Bendigo, is interested in the 'real' responses to nature in Australia and this was the focus if her talk*.

There are many derisive comments about what terrible things first settlers and goldminers have done to the environment and how un-appreciative they were of its beauty.
It is 'general knowledge' that these white people who first came to Victoria during the goldmining era only viewed the land as something to be mined, farmed and harvested or developed. The more recent literature has these examples:
For over 200 years a class of men with terribly simple purposes and equally simple conceptions of the ends of life, highly organised and wielding great powers, have imposed their impoverished outlook on the people and nature of Australia. (William Lines 1991).
or
It has been argued to the point where is has become 'conventional wisdom that Australia's colonists not only despised their environment but also were blind to their own destructiveness' (Tim Bonyhady 2000)

However, as with all things, most expressions of attitudes to the land, published in colonial days, probably belonged to the vocal majority because even then, there were some people who did see the beauty of the land (they were just not as obvious as, say, 'greenies' these days).
For example, a newspaper article in the Mount Alexander Mail (23/8/1858) describing the discovery and shooting of a native bear... *(which had two or three young ones in its pouch but these were quickly devoured by the dog...)* did not cause any public outcry or debate. Was that because no public debating was done in those days or because this appreciative minority was more or less silent and/or resolved to what 'needed to be done'?

Deirdre began exploring this topic by analysing the attitudes of writers from the goldmining era, William Urquhart, the district surveyor 1940s - 1862 and three travellers to the goldfields from the mid-1850s, William Howitt, John Sherer and Antoine Fauchery.

Urquhart's maps were annotated from a purely utilitarian viewpoint....indicating soil quality for potential farmland and giving mineralogical detail with vegetation being referred to as 'scrubby'.

To see people honestly occupying the land was Urquhart's ideal and he paid every attention to the comfort, safety and protection of the people both in marking out the farms and village lots.

Upon reflection of his life's work Urquhart mused...*and I also had the satisfaction of seeing that the new inhabitants really enjoyed the comforts of their new homes with renewed vigour, they have a fine country before them - long my they be blessed with health, and peace, and sweet content.*

Urquhart represented the official government view which saw opportunity through gold and land development. Opportunity for freedom from hunger and poverty, opportunity of an ordered society and a productive landscape but also an opportunity for freedom from the hierarchical control of resources.

For the 'people on the land', as shown by Howitt's and Sherer's writing, this view of seeing the land as 'useful' or 'useless' was also widespread, particularly for their immediate comfort and survival. They ate the wildlife and shot it often for the sport as well.

However, like modern day campers or bushwalkers, they also obtained great satisfaction from their direct experience of the outdoors. A quote from Howitt reads:

We sat down on the grass, and took our tea-supper by a blazing log, at the foot of a magnificent white gum-tree, in great jollity. The sky above us was cloudless and of the deepest blue. My old acquaintances, the Southern Cross, the splendid Scorpion, and the Magellan Clouds, bright as at sea, called back my thoughts to the days of our voyage. On the hill opposite us were three other tents belonging to parties going the same way; their fires lit up the trees around in all their azure foliage most beautifully. Our horses were tethered near the great luxury of grass; and thus passed the fifth of November 1852.

I am sure we can all sympathise with those feelings of freedom in nature. Another kind of freedom, the freedom from restrictions and oppression is expressed by Sherer when he describes the mood of a group of miners singing around the campfire:

There were some remarkable features, however in many - indeed I may say in most of their songs; and these were the bearing they had upon the charms of labour when it meets its reward, the pleasure of plenty of food, the sweets of freedom, the blessing of hope, the exemption from taxes, and the joys of a life in the bush.

Although enjoying the bush, the people on the land did not have any concept of ecology and how the various components depend on each other for functioning. While the land appeared like "one huge unreclaimed forest" it was not possible to see this as a "healthy state". Howitt wrote:
The immense quantity of vegetable matter rotting on the surface of the earth, and still more of that rotting in the waters, which the new vistants must drink, cannot be very healthy. The choked up valleys, dense with scrub and rank weeds, and the equally rank vegetation of swamps, cannot tend ot health. All these evils, the axe and the plough, and the fire of settlers, will gradually and eventually remove; and when that is done here, I do not believe there will be a more healthy country on the globe.

While this might make our stomachs turn today, my personal interpretation is that those words did not come out of disregard for the land but plain ignorance of ecological principles.
It is interesting how land naturally clear of trees or with few trees was very appealing to the european eyes. Howitt wrote that the country *was very fine and pleasant to look at. We advanced over open plains in many places perfectly clear of wood, in others only thinly sprinkled, and the edges of the forest showing themselves at a distance, had a most civilised look.*

Fauchery obviously had an eye for birds and here he writes a very poetic piece, clearly expressing his appreciation of what he saw:
Parrots are particularly pleasing...they gather in immense swarms, and usually in the least hidden parts of the woods. At a sunny time of day these gatherings reach the most fantastic proportions for a European eye. The white cockatoos with yellow or red crest, the little green parrots, the multi-coloured parrots flap their wings, wheel round the branches, chase each other through the grass, flutter, mingle and mate like mating doves. You would think you were seeing Nature in a kaleidoscope; the trees are many-coloured and the ground is nothing but a living carpet, where rubies, turquoises, emeralds and opals twine together in wild arabesques.

The country could also be intimidating, however, and the lack of familiarity tended to make people homesick and scared at times. Fauchery, in spite of his appreciation of the parrot fauna, wrote of the forest around him:
You plunge for sixty miles - what am I talking about? For ever! - into woods, woods without coppices, almost entirely made up of big trees with long grey leaves, rather like birch leaves, attached to a knotty mass of boughs that rise in epileptic up-thrusts from a trunk seemingly robust but usually rotten at the core. An implacable malady eats away at these gigantic shoots, and when a spring wind blows, the branches fall off as the leaves fall from our oaks in winter. In some spots small pine-trees, very dry and black, shake their meagre plumes above a sterile tract f land that produces neither flower nor fruit, and is covered only with dead wood or with a coarse sort of couch-grass on which you cannot even sit. So don't expect to see a stag bound away at the turn of the road, a hare jump up from its form, a partridge or a pheasant rise from under your feet, for none these tasty bits o game could make do with the poor fare that the Australian soil offers.

Howitt showed this insight though:
To us this is a strange land, to the next generation it will be a native land. To them, the inverted seasons will possess no inversion. To them, the gum tree and the wattle will assume the place of the oak and the elm. The warbling crow and the laughing jackass will be their blackbird and hereditary rook. To them, the smooth outlines of the Australian landscape will appear as charming as to us the abrupt and picturesque scenery of the northern hemisphere.

In spite of this subtle appreciation of nature and the landscape, it was accepted that everything had to give way to gold. If it was suspected that gold was hidden beneath a patch of nature or a building for that matter, whatever it was had to

give way. Howitt deplores the destruction of the Bendigo valley and describes the scene as:
one huge chaos of clay, gravel, stones and pipeclay, thrown out of the bowels of the earth.

We have begun to destroy the beauty of this creek. It will no longer run clear between its banks, covered with wattles and tea-trees, and amongst its shallow parts overgrown with foreign looking shrubs, flags and cypress-grass. A little while, and its whole course will exhibit nothing but nakedness, and heaps of gravel and mud. We diggers are horribly destructive of the picturesque.

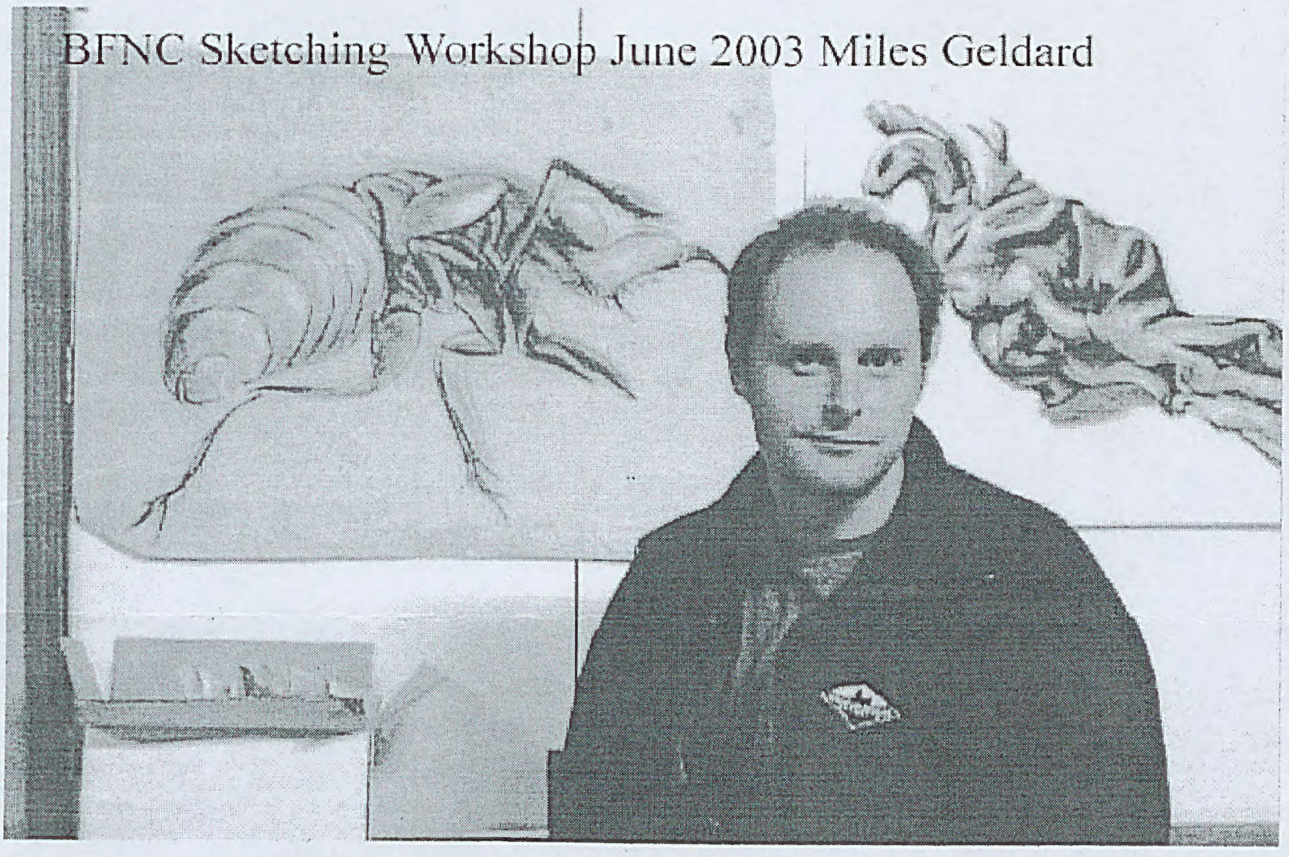
This destruction in the path of farming and gold seems to have been accepted as a necessary evil. Deirdre likened this feeling to us going to the supermarket where we get given mountains of plastic bags. We know we should use our own shopping bags, but take the plastic ones nevertheless with a twinge of a bad conscience....

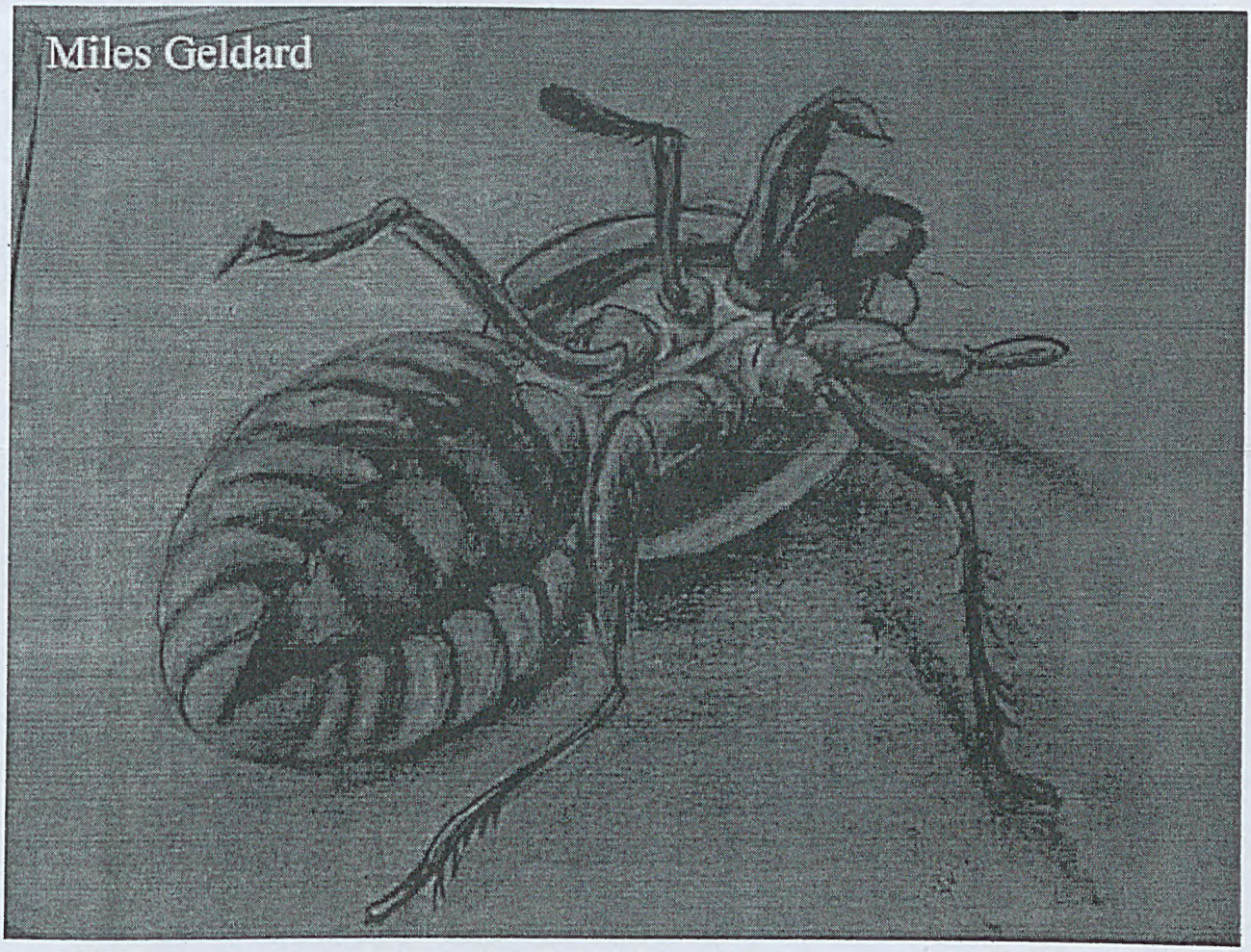
In conclusion then, Deirdre summarised that
- the colonists were unfettered by the belief that nature could be threatened on any major scale by their activities
- they were preoccupied by those aspects of damage that they observed, notably health, sludge, tree felling and lack of clean water.
- they were less aware of many ecological connections we understand today
- they had strong moral values about nature that focussed largely on their ideals about access to land
- land was a means to realising their values about 'the public interest'
- they did not have much interest in the integrity of nature outside human needs, of a moral universe in which plants and animals had moral claims independent of humans.

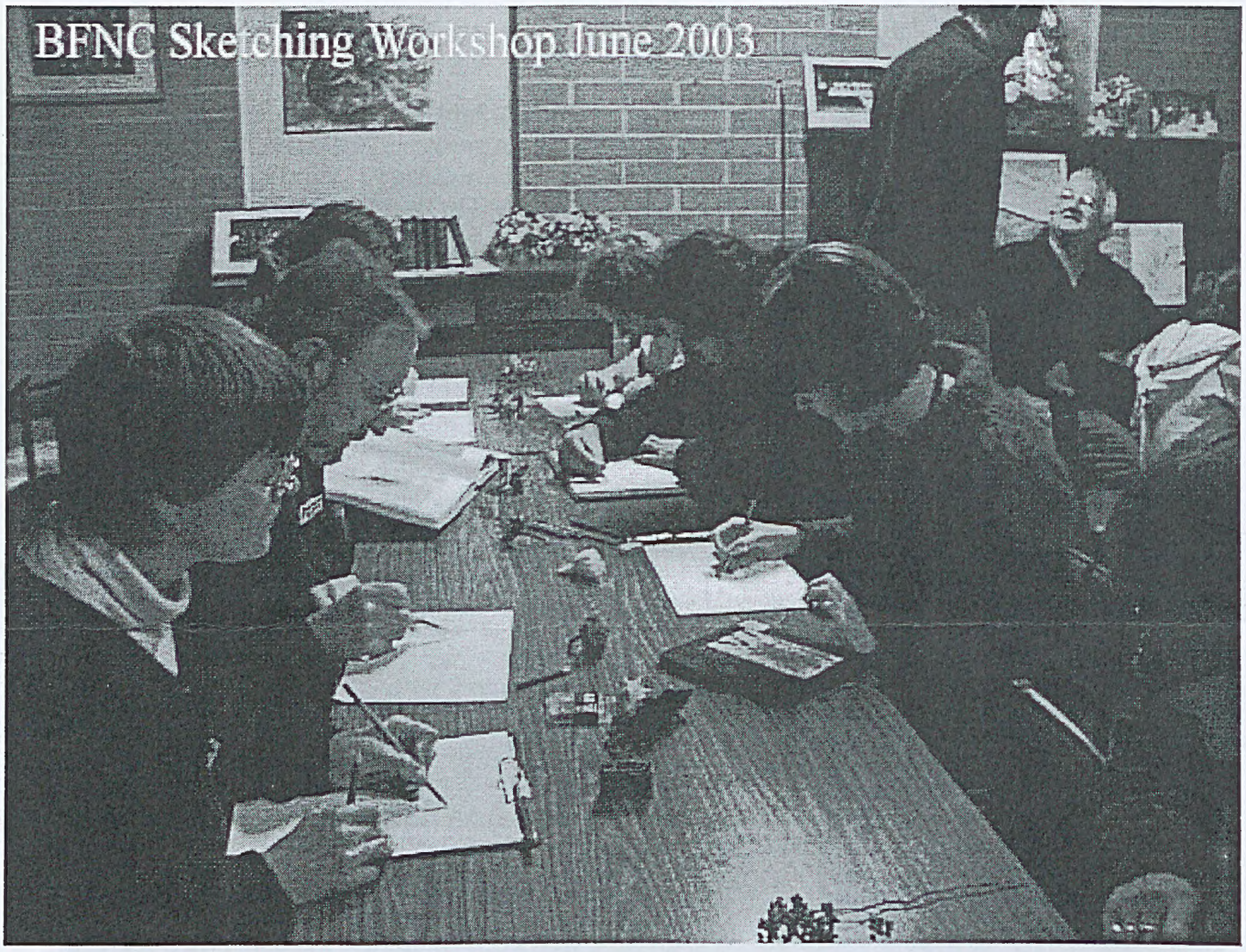
I thoroughly enjoyed this talk. It was a different and obviously popular topic as many extra chairs were needed to accommodate visitors. The many quotes are a very direct and honest way of showing the perceptions of those days and for this reason I have put many in this write-up.

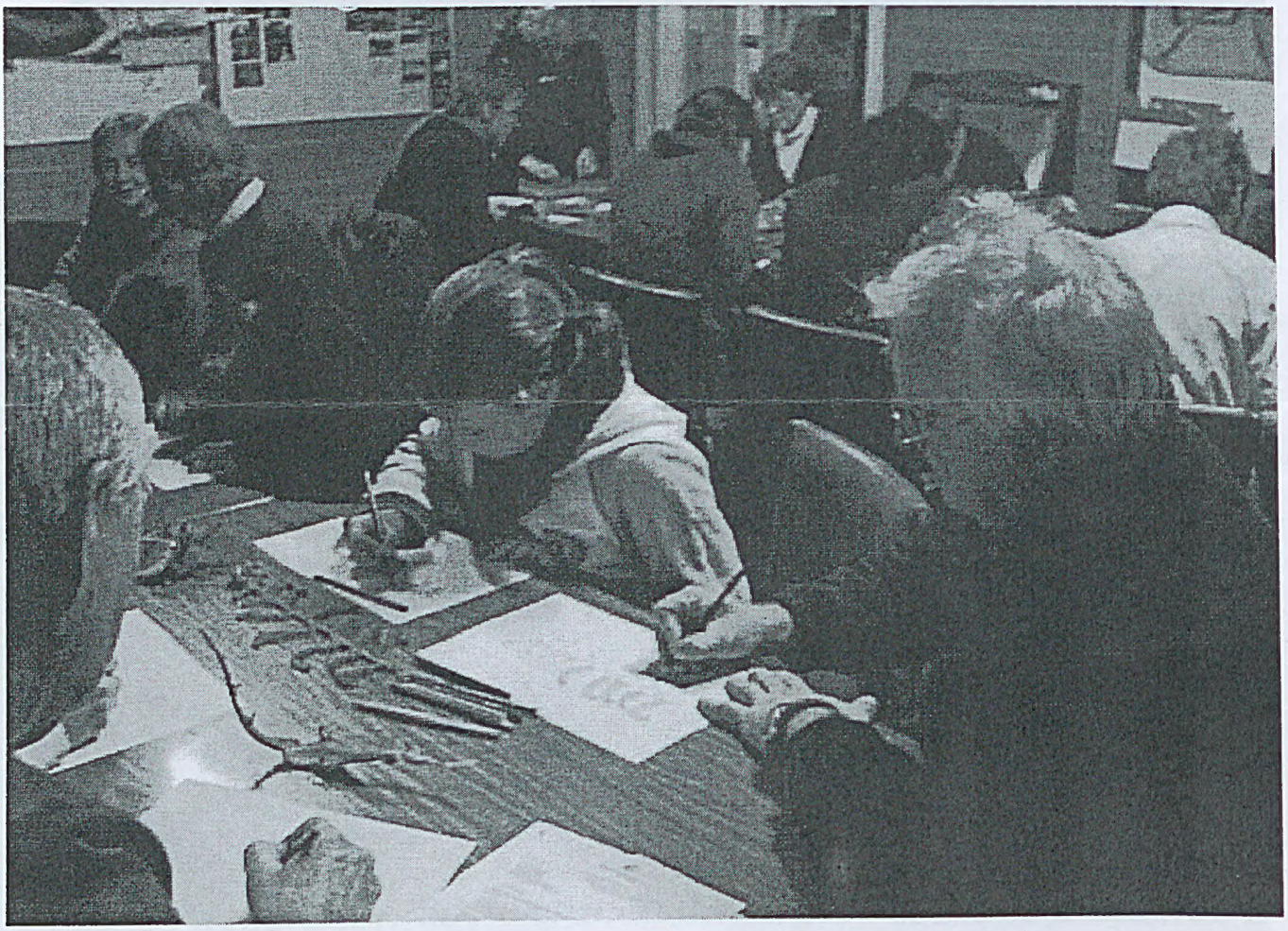
** N.B. (For this summary, Deirdre made the original slides available to me. Many sentences are taken from these slides and they are thus Deirdre's not my own words). However, only quotes from the literature are printed in italics. Please contact Deirdre (directly or via the editor) for literature references on this topic.*

A successful workshop **Photos by Darren Green**


BFNC Sketching Workshop June 2003 Miles Geldard


Miles Geldard


BFNC Sketching Workshop June 2003



Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Guest Speaker Syllabus for General Meetings 2003
Second Wednesday 8:00 pm

Please check each **WHIRRAKEE** for additional events or changes.
If a workshop is planned, it will start at 7:00pm. The speaker will be introduced at 8:00 pm.
If there is no workshop, the general meeting will start at 7:30pm, with the speaker being introduced at 8:00pm.

Date - 2001	Topic	Speaker
July 9	'The recent bushfires in the Victorian Alps and the process of recovery.'(watch out!, this talk contains some chemistry)	Michael Angove & Daniel Bennett (La Trobe University, Bendigo)
August 13	'Recognition and conservation of sites of geological significance': (examples from the Bendigo region; alpine Australia and the Newer Volcanic Province).	Neville Rosengren
September 10	AGM: 'Ups & downs of BFNC's Conservation campaigns'- A biased and selective Report Card of some of our Club's activities.	
October 8	'Classification of Threatened Fauna in Victoria - definition & assessment of 'Threatened Fauna'; what it means to be on the list.'	Peter Menkhost (Arthur Rylah Institute)
November 12	'The importance of Environmental Flows in rivers, streams and wetland areas.'	Paul Sinclair (Environment Victoria)
December 10	Christmas Dinner 'Birds of the Box-Ironbark Forest'	Chris Tzaros

Diary

The General, Bird Observers Group and Fauna Study Group meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

General Meeting

Wednesday, July 9 7.30pm
'The recent bushfires in the Victorian Alps and the process of recovery.' Daniel Bennett, an Honours students from LaTrobe University and Dr Michael Angove have been investigating the chemistry of ash generated in a bushfire and the potential consequences for the water supply of regions originating in the alpine catchment. There will also be lots of pictures of the initial fire damage and recovery over the subsequent months.

Bird Observers Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30pm. Please confirm with Kerrie Norris (ph 54478017)

Fauna Group

This group meets (in the clubrooms) on the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7.30pm. The next meetings are on:

Wednesday, July 23 7.30pm
To be announced

Wednesday, August 27
To be announced

Wednesday, September 2
A.G.M. plus topic of interest to be announced.

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals.
It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Natural Resources and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.

Know your frog

The following sites both refer specifically to the Victorian frog fauna:

http://www.frogs.org.au/frogs/ is based closely upon the Frogwatch Field guide to Victorian Frogs. It has great information--photos, maps, keys, and pie charts to depict seasonal activity.

http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/collections/showcase.asp takes you to the showcase page at the Museum of Victoria. This site has links to accounts of other Victorian fauna besides frogs, including a great links to the butterflies and reptiles of Victoria. This site has bigger photos of the frogs than the other site, and longer call bites (taken from the Frogwatch tape, with introductions by Murray Littlejohn), but the sound can be slow to load up.